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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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SUBJECT: TURKEY'S FOREIGN MINISTER OUTLINES POLICY FOR AKP  
FAITHFUL

Classified By: Consul General Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. Several thousand Istanbul Justice and Development Party (AKP) precinct captains and party faithful jammed an auditorium January 13 to hear Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul acclaim Turkey's foreign policy achievements and goals as the party continues its campaign to energize its cohort of election workers in advance of national elections later this year. Pointing to its diplomacy on Cyprus and with the EU, the Foreign Minister characterized Turkey as "powerful" on the world scene, in contrast to its international role prior to 2003. Work in Iraq is just beginning, he added; a "big fire there would engulf us all." While working to bring peace and better conditions to all Iraqis, the Turkoman minority will continue to get special attention from Ankara. Notable was the cursory mention of the U.S. in contrast to a clear focus on Turkey's neighbors. This appears to have been the rehearsal for the impassioned defense of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government's foreign policy that Gul delivered to parliament January 18. End summary.

12. (C) We observed one of three AKP rallies held for Istanbul party workers on January 13. Ministers of State Ali Babacan and Kursat Tuzmen spoke at separate locations; we attended the gathering where an overflow crowd of AKP faithful - middle income couples as well as youth, with virtually all women wearing headscarves and most also wearing "modest" overcoats - sat on steps to hear Foreign Minister Gul. In contrast, Aysegul Topal and Canan Kalsin, Istanbul AKP women's chair and foreign policy chair, respectively, appeared on the stage with no head covering. The introduction of the Foreign Minister brought people to their feet with thunderous applause, with some rushing forward to get as close to this party luminary as possible. Acknowledging party workers had a tough sell in explaining Turkey's foreign policy to the electorate, he nevertheless trumpeted the AK Party's foreign policy achievements.

13. (C) Gul proclaimed Turkey a "powerful" nation with an image in the world vastly superior to even the recent past. As evidence, he pointed to Turkey's huge growth in exports, a reformist government that international media no longer wrote off, and a market-place keenly attractive to international investors. Turkey was becoming "important" in its own right, no longer dependent on some other power to attract attention or to wield influence. The Foreign Minister mentioned official visits to or from foreign leaders associated with Australia, Brazil, the U.S., Sudan, Italy (Prodi, not the Pope) and Saudi Arabia. He emphasized that the list included both western and "Islamic" countries, a subtle contrast to the efforts of the Republic since its founding to pursue the west with AKP's emphasis on immediate neighbors and majority Muslim countries without alienating the west.

14. (SBU) Gul noted that AK Party workers could proudly tell their neighbors that while Turkey used to ask for foreign assistance and support, it is now a donor country engaged in assistance programs throughout the world, including in Indonesia and Africa, through the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA). (TIKA chair Hakan Fidan told the New Anatolian in April 2006, Turkey is now a net donor country with over USD 340 million in annual projects going into technical and development assistance in countries from Bosnia to Tajikistan.) Turkey's foreign relations are pro-active; the U.S. and EU are not competing alternatives to one another, Gul said; rather, these elements of Turkey's foreign policy "come together." But he declared Turkey's most important relations were now with "our neighbors." These neighbors were "not chosen" but good relations with them were better than tension and Turkey would not "differentiate" among them; trade is critical and no neighbor can be neglected. Turkey is like a second home now to these friends. Previous governments had relied on the U.S. and Canada to increase trade but today, Gul asserted, strengthened ties with immediate neighbors was key to unlocking huge commercial growth for Turkey.

15. (SBU) In explaining the EU accession situation, Gul implicitly criticized previous governments for missing earlier opportunities. Even though Turkey was now down to "the last wagon on the train," in Gul's words, accession remained important because the EU represents a huge market. Turkey was working hard to improve standards, avoid the mistakes of the past and "fulfill its responsibilities." Coming to Cyprus, Gul -- without explicitly saying so -- pointed to the end of Turkey's political isolation on the issue. The Prime Minister had met many times with counterparts on the issue, an American congressional

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delegation had flown into Ercan airport in Turkish Northern Cyprus, and now Turkey was calling for and even demanding recognition of Northern Cyprus. There were about 100 outstanding legal challenges to Turkey before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) but Turkey was investigating how it could steal a march on the human rights community and successfully bring suit before the court with respect to claims in Cyprus.

16. (SBU) The Foreign Minister made the most critical topic his last and a hush fell over the crowd as he discussed Iraq. The country was important for the entire region and a "big fire there would burn us all." Iraq and the people of Iraq could be rich by virtue of oil wealth but a wrongful dictator had brought the country low. Turkey would do its best to resolve a conflict where people were again dying after the million deaths in the Iran-Iraq war. Tools in the battle to right the wrongs in Iraq included fair distribution of petro dollars and a (political) agreement, without which "the fire would spread." Emphasizing that Turkey wanted all Iraqis "happy," Turkey had a special duty to protect the rights of the Turkoman. The Foreign Minister made no mention whatsoever of the U.S. with respect to Iraq.

17. (SBU) The world situation would be better, Gul concluded, when the Israeli/Palestinian issue was settled. All had to work for friendship between these two peoples and once again, he said, there was movement toward improving the situation. Similarly, the Sunni/Shia divide is dangerous so Prime Minister Erdogan is actively working with all the countries involved to find a solution.

18. (C) Comment. Foreign Minister Gul expertly outlined the AKP's take on Turkey's foreign relations. While not explicitly saying so, each of Gul's points served to underline a definite shift in the Republic's approach to relations with the world. Whether or not one argues the presentation was crafted to appeal to the headscarved and conservative faithful in the room, it was a coherent

presentation of the priorities in Turkey's foreign policy -- with barely a whisper of the United States, even as the policy goals were consistent with our own, suggesting the "special relationship" may be losing currency on the Turkish side of the Atlantic, at least in an election year. It was also a useful rehearsal for Gul's impassioned defense of the AKP foreign policy, delivered extemporaneously to parliament January 18, to fend off a censure motion. End comment.

JONES